What is Claimed is:

1.   A method of user-defined structured interaction online, comprising the steps of:

defining an interaction genre;

5   creating an operational instance of the genre, said instance being initialized to a predetermined state;

monitoring input from online users operatively connected to said instance;

updating a state of the instance and responding to user's requests if said input satisfies a criteria set by the instance's interaction rules; and

10   broadcasting the updated state to all online users operatively connected to the instance.

2.   The method of claim 1 wherein the step of defining an interaction genre includes one of copying and modifying a previously defined interaction genre.

3.   The method of claim 1 wherein the step of defining an interaction genre
15   includes specifying rules of a graphic representation of the genre, including rules specifying how interactions are represented.

4.   The method of claim 3 wherein the graphic representation includes specified symbols representing respective users' roles

5.   The method of claim 3 wherein the graphic representation includes specified distances from references to proportionally represent action or nonaction of users.

6.   The method of claim 3 wherein the graphic representation includes specified positions representing status of respective users.

7.   The method of claim 1 wherein said step of creating an operation instance of a genre includes setting genre parameters.

8.   The method of claim 7 wherein said genre parameters include genre roles.

9.   The method of claim 7 wherein said genre parameters include rule parameters.

10.   The method of claim 1 wherein said input includes one of text messages, audio clips and video clips.

11.   The method of claim 3 wherein said input includes the user's change in roles by dragging and dropping of graphics elements of the graphic representation of the state of the instance.

12.   The method of claim 1 wherein said user's requests include requesting to ask a question.

13.   The method of claim 1 wherein said user's requests include a request for a clarification.

14.   The method of claim 1 wherein said step of monitoring includes monitoring the passage of time between inputs by a user.

5   15.   A method of user-defined structured interaction online, comprising the steps of:

defining an interaction genre;

creating an operational instance of the genre, said instance being initialized to a predetermined state;

10   monitoring input from online users operatively connected to said instance;

updating a state of the instance and executing specified actions in response to enforcement rules; and

broadcasting the updated state to all online users operatively connected to the instance.

15   16.   The method of claim 15 wherein said step of updating the state of the instance and executing specified actions in response to enforcement rules includes sending the rule violator a message.

17.   The method of claim 15 wherein said step of updating the state of the instance and executing specified actions in response to enforcement rules includes
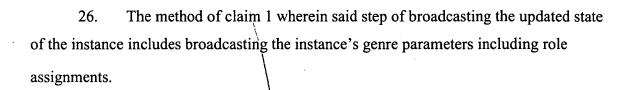20   disconnecting a user violating said rules from the current instance.

18.   The method of claim 15 wherein said step of updating the state of the instance and executing specified actions in response to enforcement rules includes barring a user violating said rules from future connections for a specified period of time.

19.   The method of claim 15 wherein said step of updating the state of the instance and executing specified actions in response to enforcement rules includes modifying an iconic representation of a user violating said rules in a graphic representation of the genre instance.

20.   The method of claim 15 wherein said step of updating the state of the instance in response to interaction rules includes changing the genre of the instance.

21.   The method of claim 20 wherein the graphic representation of the instance is changed in response to the changing of its genre.

22.   The method of claim 15 wherein said step of updating the state of the instance includes changing one or more genre parameters including genre roles.

23.   The method of claim 15 wherein said updating step includes repositioning of the icons representing the operative users.

24.   The method of claim 28 wherein said updating step includes modifying icons to represent changes in roles of respective users.

25.   The method of claim 1 wherein said step of broadcasting the updated state of the instance includes broadcasting the instance's genre rules.

26.   The method of claim 1 wherein said step of broadcasting the updated state of the instance includes broadcasting the instance's genre parameters including role assignments.

27.   The method of claim 1 wherein said step of broadcasting the updated state of the instance includes the broadcast of the graphic representation of the state of the instance.

28.   The method of claim 1, further including the step of identifying a given user by moving a cursor over the icon representing that user.

29.   A computer-based medium having stored programs readable by a computer for causing the computer to execute method steps for facilitating interaction among a plurality of users operatively connected to the computer, the method comprising the steps of:

receiving requests from the plurality of users to participate in an interactive session;

registering said users by storing user identifications and passwords of respective users;

storing said identifications and passwords in a user database;

authorizing said users as participants in the interactive session upon receiving a clearance signal;
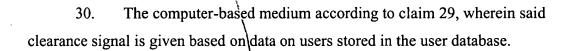
setting parameters and rules governing the interactive session and informing the participants of the parameters and rules;

monitoring inputs from the participants during the interactive session; and

enforcing penalties upon participants violating said rules.

30.   The computer-based medium according to claim 29, wherein said clearance signal is given based on data on users stored in the user database.

31.   The computer-based medium according to claim 29, further including the step of modifying said parameters by said participants.

5   32.   The computer-based medium according to claim 29, wherein said step of enforcing penalties includes associating violation data with user data of violating participants in the user database.